

# American Journal of Public Health

Official Monthly Publication of the American Public Health Association

Publication office: 124 W. Polk Street, Chicago, Ill.

Editorial office: 370 Seventh Avenue, New York City

Subscription price, \$5 per year. American Public Health Association membership, including subscription \$5 per year. Subscriptions and memberships should be sent to the A. P. H. A., 370 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Vol. XI

AUGUST, 1921

No. 8

## LABOR CAMP SANITATION—A BASIS FOR EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

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Read before joint meeting of Sociological and Industrial Hygiene Sections, American Public Health Association, at San Francisco, Cal., September 14, 1920

Labor camps in California have proved a new and substantial basis for citizenship on the part of a class heretofore scarcely considered in the problem of government. With camps having proper sanitation the lower type of labor and the agitator are eliminated. Campers of today aid the inspectors by giving notice of bad sanitary conditions.

**D**URING the past ten years California has witnessed a complete transformation in the living conditions of her migratory laborer. During the latter years of the same period there has come an even more striking change in the attitude of our people regarding necessary standards of construction and sanitation of labor camps.

Twenty years ago the labor camp, except in established year-round occupations, was almost an unclassified object. Large crowds of people were brought together indiscriminately to pick hops or prunes or work in the cannery or packing house and the fact of their being together was an incident unconsidered in the season's program. Sometimes they were people, largely women and children, who were supposed to live at home, and who

perhaps came and camped close to the scene of activities for their own convenience or by way of a vacation. Sometimes they were hoboos who demanded nothing. Increasingly, from year to year came the distressed, or lazy, and usually large-familied immigrant, not yet adjusted to his environment, grasping at these opportunities to lay by a little capital for the rainy season.

In those days the operator who provided a camp ground with drinking water was regarded as generous in the extreme. Generally it was assumed that every pretty little creek bottom, every fence corner, every big-tree shade area was a proper camping place. Each worker, or worker's family, brought his entire outfit, and nature supplied the details. Throughout the balance of fall and winter, until

the rains and floods came to clean the face of nature, these erstwhile pretty little places stunk to the heavens with human and animal offal, garbage, rubbish and filth of all varieties and descriptions, while flies multiplied and thrived without protest. I have lived in those camps, and remember that I deliberately chose the protection to be found in a clump of poison oak or scrub brush in preference to the toilet facilities which happened to exist, or which chanced to have been provided, and which within two or three days of the opening of the season, were sufficiently fouled to be productive of extreme nausea on sight. I also recall vividly, sitting down to eat on the ground or at an improvised table, and keeping one arm waving in front of me to protect the food from flies while I hurried it to my mouth with the other.

These conditions probably reached the extreme about the year 1913, when heavy and increasing crops, and the vastly recruited army of workers, made the unregulated methods of the past impossible without serious friction. You have all heard of the Wheatland hop riots of that year. We can well afford to consider briefly the actual camp conditions which existed prior to that outbreak. The report of an unprejudiced investigator, one of my predecessors as executive officer of the Commission of Immigration and Housing, contains the following statements:

"In answer to Durst's fanciful advertisements scattered throughout California, and even in Nevada, about 3,000 people arrived on the ranch within four days. They came by every conceivable means of transportation. A great number had no blankets and slept on piles of straw thrown onto the tent floors. These tents were rented from Durst at 75 cents per night, though some old tents were donated by him free of charge. Before these, and other accommodations were ready, many slept in the fields. One group of 45 men, women and children slept packed closely together on a single

pile of straw. The moral conditions of these hop fields are notoriously lax, and this camp was no exception. At least one-half of the campers were absolutely destitute and those who got an opportunity to work were forced to cash in their checks each evening to feed tent companions. There are many recorded instances of actual suffering and hunger.

*"Toilets:* Perhaps the most vicious sanitary abuse was that of toilets. There were probably nine of these for the 2,800 people. There were certainly not less than eight, nor more than eleven. These toilets accommodated two persons and were crude boxes placed over a hole two feet in depth. About half the toilets had no boards with the customary holes cut in them, but had a single scantling nailed across. There was no toilet inspection or cleaning. They were used indiscriminately by Hindus, Japanese, negroes, whites, women and children. By the end of the second day the seats, scantlings and floors were covered by a semi-liquid mass of filth. The stench, under the great heat, became so nauseating that many instances of vomiting have been recorded. Lines of 15 to 20 women and children frequently formed awaiting their turns at the toilet, and since dysentery had become prevalent, I have heard of instances of women humiliating themselves before passing men. Children were seen about the camp in an unspeakably filthy condition, since it was not possible for them to use any toilet without befouling themselves. It must again be noted that these facts were known to the Durst management. Many of the campers soon refused to use the toilets and began using the fields in the near neighborhood of the tents. Some of these toilets were placed in immediate proximity to the wells. There were no toilets in the fields and women were pointed out and called after as they went back among the vines. At the end of three days the fields were in a filthy condition.

*"Garbage:* Despite the easily forecasted garbage problem that would of

necessity arise in a camp of nearly 3,000 people, no real provision was made to take care of the garbage. Food and refuse were thrown out beside and behind the tents, and even in the paths. The toilets were used as garbage receptacles and the entrails of a sheep killed, according to report, by the Syrians, were thrown into one of the toilets. This toilet was found later to be absolutely filled with maggots. A group of families killed a sheep about Thursday or Friday of this week, and on Monday a militia surgeon saw the entrails lying beside the tent in the sun as he went there to attend a sick child. This absolute want of garbage disposal without doubt accounts for a dangerous epidemic of dysentery which had run through the camp by Saturday of that week.

*"Water:* The wells, probably because the water supply had been diminished by two dry years, were absolutely insufficient for the camp. Two of the wells were often pumped dry by sun-up, and the campers were forced to either go to town for water, or to distant wells among the ranch buildings. An important part of the hop field was more than a mile away from the wells, but despite the great heat of this week no water was transported to the pickers. Durst told your investigator that although they knew, as a rule, picking began on the ranch by Thursday or Friday, he never planned to have the water wagon go out to the fields until the following Monday. He gave no explanation as to the reason for this rule. The pickers during this week would be in the fields by dawn—about 4 o'clock—and about 200 to 300 children were taken into the fields with the woman. By noon, under the hot sun beating down on the still air held between the rows of vines, the children, many of whom were very small, were in a pitiable condition because of the lack of water. Numerous instances of sickness and partial prostration among children from 5

to 10 years of age were mentioned in testimony.

"Durst had let a lemonade concession to his cousin, Jim Durst, who offered lemonade in the fields during this period at 5 cents a glass. This lemonade was proven upon the testimony of the druggist with whom Jim Durst traded to have been made entirely of citric acid.

"A concession to sell stew had been sold and a stew wagon went out about noon among pickers and if stew was purchased a glass of water could be obtained with it."

These were the conditions leading up to the violent outburst of that year which caused the death and injury of a number of people, and for which two men, professional agitators, are still serving long time prison sentences. It is a picture, however, which is interesting to us now, only because it provides a basis of comparison. It is typical of a past era in this state, and of conditions which have been to a large extent eliminated. And therein lies the story of the administration of the Camp Sanitation Act by the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California.

During its session of 1913, the California legislature passed the first Labor Camp Sanitation Act. The act was approved on May 29, 1913, and went into effect on August 10, 1913, just seven days after the occurrence of the Wheatland riots. The enforcement of the act was first placed in the hands of the State Board of Health, but in the spring of 1914, by mutual consent and because of the involved problem of the immigrant, the work was taken over by the Commission of Immigration and Housing. The 1915 legislature formally transferred jurisdiction from the State Board of Health. Since April 1, 1914, the Commission of Immigration and Housing has a continuous record of camp inspection which down to date of August 1, 1920, totals 7,176 original inspections; an average of more than 1,000 per year. At

the present time our camp department staff, consisting of three inspectors in addition to the director of the department, is inspecting at the rate of more than 2,000 per year, and in addition is making the necessary reinspections to insure compliance with the commission's orders.

The Camp Sanitation Act to which I have referred, even with its amendments, is a model of simplicity and brevity, covering as it does less than two printed pages. So far the act has not received interpretation in any court of record and is unique in having accomplished so much, including over 25 criminal convictions, without having been challenged on the ground of unconstitutionality or the other usual grounds of attack.

It is remarkable that in this day of progressive legislation and of legal decisions resulting therefrom, no definition has been developed of the nature and extent of labor camps. We apparently merely assume that they are and do exist. Even our California act does not pretend to define, but merely specifies that: "In or at any camp where five or more persons are employed" certain minimum requirements must be satisfied. Those requirements, briefly stated, include the provision of the following necessary facilities:

1. Bunkhouses or other sleeping quarters sufficient to protect the occupants from the elements, kept cleanly, and located on clean and properly situated camp grounds.
2. Beds or bunks.
3. Screened and otherwise sanitary dining quarters and rooms for storage and preparation of food.
4. Adequate and sanitary toilet facilities.
5. Sanitary facilities for garbage disposal.
6. Adequate bathing facilities.
7. Appointment of "a responsible person to assist in keeping the camp clean."

The act further provides for the abate-

ment as a nuisance of any camp not properly kept, and makes all persons responsible for the presence of the camp criminally liable for failure to comply with any of its provisions.

When some of the old-time camp operators first visualized the type of camp required by law, they were astounded and fervently assured themselves, the world at large, and particularly the Commission of Immigration and Housing that such requirements were absurd. We have numerous letters on file assuring us that these "hoboes" or "these Mexicans" or "these foreigners" wouldn't take a bath if they had a chance. We value perhaps more the series of letters which came in later, admitting frankly the beneficial results of the establishment of sanitary camps; describing in detail how glad the workers were to use the facilities provided, and how much more efficient and contented they had become.

Our inspectors have worked quietly and carefully, educating the camp operator, persuading the worker to bring his complaints to us, enlisting the aid of the local newspaper, and cooperating with local health and law enforcement officers.

The steady day by day work of the camp department consists, of course, in camp inspection. Visits are made to each camp; conditions are carefully noted and full reports mailed to the San Francisco office. If the camp operator is found, he is advised personally of necessary changes. In any event, in every case a letter is sent direct from the main office signed by the executive officer. If the camp is in good condition a commendatory letter is sent out. Frequently the camp operator is sufficiently proud of his record so that such a letter finds its way into the local paper. If changes are found to be necessary to put the camp into good condition, then a detailed statement of necessary changes is mailed. Where these recommendations are not cheerfully complied with (they usually are) then reinspections are made; and in the extreme cases criminal prosecutions

are used to bring such operators into line. Local court officials, district attorneys, and the people themselves as represented on trial juries have shown themselves in wholehearted sympathy with the camp sanitation act and anxious to coöperate in securing its enforcement.

In addition to inspection work a great deal of advisory work is done by the commission's camp department and many operators now write in for directions or come personally to inquire for assistance in camp construction and maintenance.

In the performance of the schedule of work thus briefly outlined, our men find a continuous yearly cycle of work. To one unfamiliar with the variety of California's products, and unacquainted with climatic conditions in this state, the problem of labor camp sanitation may at first glance appear to be merely a short season problem. But, though many of the individual crops are harvested in short seasons, taken altogether, they provide year-round employment for the migratory army of labor, and our inspectors move rapidly through successive crops of cotton, citrus fruits, vegetables, berries, apricots, hay, barley, wheat, sugar beets, apples, prunes, peaches, hops, raisins, rice and cotton again. Add to these such more or less permanent establishments as general ranch camps including cattle ranches, railroad and highway construction camps, lumber camps, mining camps, oil camps, railroad maintenance and section camps, logging and quarry camps; and the variety and extent of California's widespread labor camp activity becomes apparent.

Today good labor camps are the rule and conditions which formerly gave rise to I. W. W.ism are no longer seriously prevalent. While it cannot be said that there are no more insanitary camps, or that the I. W. W. agitator is no longer present, it can be truly said that comparative numbers of good and bad camps are reversed today as against those of 1913, and that camp operators generally understand that the poorer type of la-

borer together with his mentor, the agitator, are to be found only in camps which do not comply with the law.

It is not necessary to tell members of the A. P. H. A. of the beneficial results of sanitary camp facilities in terms of improved health and increased labor efficiency. The old 100 per cent labor turnover which used to take place in mosquito-infested camps is a relic of the past. This is only one example of the change which has been effected in this state. As a general rule the camp operators have learned the lesson quickly, and now it is a frequent occurrence for us to give advice in the construction of permanent model camps of concrete or hollow tile where formerly nothing at all was provided.

If the physical improvement of camp conditions, with the resulting comfort of the worker on the one hand and the greater labor efficiency secured by the employer on the other, were the total results which had been secured, the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California would be entitled to the highest commendation. As a matter of fact, however, an inestimably greater result has been and is being secured. There is being built up in California as a result of and growing out of the work which I have described, a new and substantial basis for citizenship on the part of a class of people heretofore scarcely considered in the problem of government. For the changes which are being wrought in the character of camp conditions are a striking example of the efficiency of education and intelligence in governmental work. The people who live and work in these camps cannot fail to learn the lesson, when they contrast the process with the methods of violence and agitation. In the same manner a salutary lesson is coming home to the camp operators and to the general public.

Formerly the laborer nursed his grievances, listened with receptive ear to the voice of the agitator and indulged in

violent outbursts which accomplished nothing. The poor people who engaged in the Wheatland riots did not even know that the camp sanitation law which they desired had already been passed by the legislature and that the results which were promised to them by the agitators as a reward for their violence were already in the way of being secured. Today these workers are coöperating with the Commission of Immigration and Housing in improving camp conditions. Instead of bunching their grievances as fuel for agitation, they are quietly writing letters to our commission—over three hundred of them each year, informing us of bad camp conditions. Then inspections are made, the difficulties removed and a basis of intelligent and friendly participation in government is provided.

Ten years ago the camp operators were, with few exceptions, providing miserable camp conditions, fighting against a disastrous labor turnover and getting poor service. Today those operators are coöperating with us and with their men in the profitable business of building a contented and efficient body of labor. The effect cannot but be illuminating to them of the desirability, of the actual need of coöperation in the great business of citizenship, and of its first prerequisite, decent and sanitary living conditions.

Ten years ago the great uninterested public assumed that the conditions which existed in labor camps were necessarily incident thereto, that the inhabitants were unfortunate, but that there the matter ended. Today the public is interested and is realizing that in the transformation which has been brought about through the untiring efforts of the Commission of Immigration and Housing is to be found an intensely practical example of efficient administrative method.

The work of the camp department constitutes only one-fourth of the whole work of this commission. In the fields of housing, legal aid and information service, and immigrant education, in-

cluding the work of Americanization, it is performing a hitherto unequalled service in the social field. Its example and influence have not by any means been confined to this state. Commendatory letters are received from all parts of the world; the Federal government has openly encouraged the extension of such work, and during the war period looked to the commission for leadership and counsel in the labor problem of the whole northwest.

In view of the situation as I have presented it to you, it seems especially timely for the American Public Health Association to be informed that at this time political attacks are being made upon the commission and upon its president.

Let me assure you, gentlemen, that just as the example of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California has gone far beyond the borders of this state in its effect, so in equal measure a successful attack upon it would result disastrously in the whole field of social progress.

The commission, by reason of the very nature of its work, stands in the forefront of the firing line in this pioneer work. It has doubtless been chosen for attack with the idea that it is the most vulnerable of all of California's administrative bodies; that its efforts in the uncertain fields of industrial readjustment and the problems of the immigrant make it more susceptible to the unprincipled attacks of those who are trying to drive a wedge of reaction into the body of our progressive social program.

It is your opportunity, gentlemen, to express your approval of the work which is being done by the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California and to take your stand with those who must be depended upon to save this pioneering work for California and for the United States.

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Note—Since this address was given the California legislature has voted its confidence in the Commission, by a substantially increased appropriation, and the attack mentioned, has, for the present at least, been entirely abandoned.—R. J. M.